

Historical Outline of Undergraduate Admissions Selection Practices and the Two-Tiered Admissions Selection System at the University of California

To guide the University in the difficult task of selecting students from a large number of eligible applicants, Universitywide guidelines were developed in the early 1970's, revised in the late 1980's, and finally revised once again in July 1996, following the adoption of SP-1 by The Regents in July 1995.

These Guidelines mandate that a specified proportion of the admitted class be selected solely on the basis of academic accomplishments. The remainder is to be selected following a review of candidates' academic accomplishments, and, in addition, of their personal backgrounds and circumstances, and other non-academic accomplishments. The criteria (academic as well as non-academic criteria) to be utilized in conducting these reviews are also described in the Guidelines.

The proportion assigned to each group to be reviewed has varied over time. In the 70s, it was evenly split at 50% for each of the two groups. Revisions recommended in the late 80s and implemented for the first time with students entering in fall 1990, changed the proportion of students to be selected on the basis of academic factors alone to 40/60%. This change was implemented to grant campuses more flexibility in crafting an entering class that would bring to the campus intellectual vitality, differences of point of view and backgrounds. Finally, effective for students entering UC in spring 1998, the proportion of students to be admitted on the basis of academic achievement alone was changed to 50/75%, following a specific requirement included in The Regents' resolution SP-1.

When the selection process was first established, one of the primary reasons for establishing a two-tiered selection system was to ensure that highly qualified students would be equitably distributed among the campuses and that not anyone campus, especially the larger campuses, Berkeley and UCLA, would take them all. Additionally, the intent was that campuses would select from the breadth of the UC eligible applicant pool, and not just from the top 1% or 2%.

The initial rationale for instituting a two-tiered system, and, in particular, the concern that no campus select only the most qualified students, have diminished in importance over the years. This is due to increased enrollment demand at other campuses besides Berkeley and UCLA, changing University goals, and new ideas on assessing applicants' ability and motivation.

In 1995, following SP-1, The Regents' resolution barring the use of race, ethnicity, and gender in admissions, the President convened a task force to review existing guidelines and to propose revisions as appropriate and in conformity with the tenets of SP-1. As noted above, the Guidelines in existence at the time had been revised in the late 80s and approved by the President for implementation in fall 1990. The Guidelines delineated academic as well as non-academic criteria for selecting the entering class at each campus and prescribed that 40/60% of the class be selected on the basis of academic criteria alone, according to campus specific processes and goals. Among non-academic criteria,

race, ethnicity and gender were included as factors for potential consideration in the admissions review process. Other criteria included special talents and achievement, disadvantage, and location of an applicant's residence. These factors taken together were included to foster diversity of the entering class, as mandated by the goals of the 1998 Regents' University of California Policy on Undergraduate Admissions.

The work of the Task Force resulted in extensive revisions to the existing Guidelines. First, the revisions addressed the requirements of SP-1: the proportion of students to be admitted on the basis of academic criteria alone was changed from 40/60% to 50/75%, and race, ethnicity and gender were removed as factors that could be included in admissions reviews. Second, and most importantly, the revisions engendered new thinking about how to best select the entering class, broadened considerably the factors that reviewers might consider, and raised significant questions on the way "academic ability", "achievement", and "motivation" should be thought of and assessed. Most of this new way of thinking engendered by the review of the Guidelines has continued in the intervening years to today, both at the Universitywide level and at the campus level. UC undergraduate admissions have been evolving as a consequence to meet new challenges and changing circumstances. One of the latest examples on this continuing evolution and innovative thinking is the Admissions Conference that occurred on December 7, 2000, which resulted in several significant recommendations, one of them being that UC move to a comprehensive admissions review process.

The most significant changes recommended by the 1995 Task Force and incorporated in the Guidelines that we use today are listed below.

- Expansion of academic criteria to provide a more comprehensive and realistic assessment of an applicant academic achievement and potential. Prior guidelines provided for 4 criteria, narrowly defined as HSGPA, test scores, number of academic courses, and honors level coursework. Current guidelines provide for 10 criteria, to include, for example, the quality of the senior year, marked improvement in academic performance, the quality of the academic performance relative to the educational opportunities available in the applicant's school, and identification as ranking in the top 4% of the class (this latter element was added when ELC was adopted for the class of 2001);
- Expansion of additional, non-academic criteria to provide a more comprehensive assessment of personal traits, accomplishments, the candidate's opportunity to learn in his or her school environment, and experiences demonstrating an applicant's promise and potential to contribute to the educational environment and intellectual vitality of the campus;
- Flexibility to campuses to make decisions based on a broad array of information with the ultimate objective of building a high achieving and diverse class that would meet local enrollment demands, educational needs, priorities and commitments.

Over the last few years, Berkeley, UCLA, and San Diego have adopted a 50/50 split between Tier 1 and Tier 2, while Davis and Irvine have 60% of their admits in the Tier 1 category and Santa Barbara 70%. Up to this point, Riverside and Santa Cruz have been

able to accept all of the UC eligible students who apply and have not had the need to employ the selection process.

For Tier 2 admissions all selecting campuses utilize the full range of admissions selection criteria listed in the Guidelines to evaluate students, although they use different methods of review processes for applying these criteria. For example, some assign points to significant factors in an applicant's file while others assess these factors in a comprehensive ("holistic") manner. The Guidelines allow for campus flexibility in selecting the processes of review and the specific criteria that best fit their local needs and circumstances. This flexibility has been the cornerstone of the admissions selection process over the years.

With regard to Tier 1, only Berkeley and UCLA and to a certain extent Irvine utilize the breadth of academic criteria listed in the Guidelines. In general, however, it can be stated that all campuses have moved more and more to expand their use of the criteria presented in the Guidelines and to read more comprehensively an increasingly higher proportion of their applicants' files. In addition, campuses have been giving more attention to evaluating students in the context of their high school.

The evolution of admissions selection practices at UC campuses reflects a deeper understanding of how the use of expanded academic criteria in combination with other factors provides a better basis for judging how individual applicants can contribute successfully to the campus environment. These practices are based upon sound principles; principles that most selective institutions in the nation follow in selecting their classes. It is widely recognized that success in college depends on both good academic preparation and also other personal attributes, such as leadership, creativity, motivation, tenacity and similar factors.